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Cultural Conflict and It's Manifestations in Achebe's Novel *Things Fall Apart*

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Abstract

"Conflict occurring between individuals or social groups that are separated by cultural boundaries can be considered "cross-cultural conflict." Considering this definition it can be said that the conflict depicted by Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* is the cultural conflict. The two groups involved in it are the native Igbos and the European colonizers. As far as Nigeria is concerned there are three main ethnic groups. They are the Hausa fulani, the Yoruba, and the igbo. The Igbos, or Ibo's belonging to southeastern Nigeria are one of 250 tribes. Out of these, many diverse tribes each have their own dialects, cultures and Political systems. Each Village has its own market place, gods and shrines. The Ibo's have one supreme god, Chukwu. Each Ibo, male and female, is given a chi at birth-a personal god who controls that person's fate. British colonization between 1900-1910 formed the many tribes into the one nation of Nigeria. The present research paper therefore, attempted to examine how Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian author and the doyen of modern African writing in English, explained his purpose in his novels, which deal with the problem of personal conflict and how he portrayed the disrupting effects of an externally imposed power system has on an internally imposed power system i.e. African tradition and customs and culture also. Conflicts within the Igbo society coupled with repercussions from external invasion result in disaster for the Igbo society which disintegrates from within and reorients itself to Christianity. This reorientation, hence, will lead not only to the assimilation of western values and beliefs, but also to the eventual loss of the Igbo Cultural Identity.

Keywords : Cultural, Conflict, Manifestation, Achebe.

The spread of imperialism in Africa has created areas of political influence and domination which naturally produced a far-reaching influence in the growth of African literature. English, French and other European languages become a part of African culture and literatures of the western world provided models for the African writers. But the native sensibility retained its identity, though layers of foreign influences become a part of African literature which successfully presented the conflicts and contradictions within the African society. The African writers have drawn the attention of the world on the predicaments faced by their people by adopting an enlightened outlook and they knew what to take from non African-cultures.

The representation of Africa in the western canon provided a distorted image of Africa. 'Africa' may be said to be no more than only a backdrop to the testing of the character or heroism of their individualized white protagonists under various kinds of stress, to their sense of achieved success or, alternatively, breakdown in a "hostile" alien, or unfamiliar environment. So while writing about Africa from inside a writer like Achebe provides a realistic image of Africa by portraying a primal African world with all its traditional and cultural ingredients. It was necessary to counter the image of Africa as a dark continent reflected in the stories of colonialists. Achebe performs this task in his groundbreaking novel '*Things fall Apart*'. He explores the culture of the Igbo land in east-Nigeria.



In the first part of the novel, *'Things Fall Apart'* Achebe presents this golden age of the Igbo land. In the second part, there are signs of the arrival of the colonizers. It is an alarm of danger for this grand old way of life. In the third part the clash between the two cultures, that of the native Igbo and European colonizers become more aggressive and ends in total destruction of the traditional culture. The word 'Igbo', according to Victor C.Uchendu, is used in three different senses: Igbo territory, domestic speakers of the language, and the language spoken by them. In the first two parts of the novel we come across many descriptions of the communal gatherings, gods, and myths about these gods, festivities, rituals and customs, laws, taboos and so on. In the first part we are introduced to the great land of the Umuofia clan, the fatherland of the protagonist Okonkwo, who is a mighty wrestler, hardworking and prosperous farmer, emissary of Umuofia in inter-tribal wars. Through Okonkwo's story the third person omniscient narrator gives vent to the lived moments of the people of the land. And many framed stories told by different characters express what Anuradha Ghosh calls '**collective unconscious**' of the people. The first part of the novel primarily revolves around the character of Okonkwo while the remaining two parts deal with the confrontations of the communal world and the world of the western intruders. But Okonkwo is not centre of the focus of the story; rather it is Igbo culture and what happens to it. It is not a world where individuals have importance but traditions and culture. Here this tradition and culture is rediscovered by delineating the clan-life.

In this novel, Achebe resists the experience of colonialism. His fiction focuses on specific local experience. Clan was supreme and individuals have to adhere to it. According to Igbo tradition clan is not for an individual but individuals are for clan, showing solidarity to the clan was mandatory. Rituals pave traditions and traditions insure continuity of a culture. Igbo was a oral tradition and so these cultural rituals and festivities have a greater role to perform in articulating integrity of the clan. The whole Igbo land is inscribed to have a similar culture; there were some differences in the rituals of the different clans. Being a post-colonial novel *'Things Fall Apart'* is a counter discourse to the Eurocentric colonialist texts like Conrad's *'Heart of Darkness'*, Cary's *'Mister Johnson'* which have shown African as having no character, no culture and no civilization. Achebe describes the cultural rituals and the morals behind observing them for demonstration of the fact that Africans have a rich and varied culture. 'The Feast of the New Yam' is one of the best examples of it. Among the other most catching rituals is the tradition of presenting cola nut to the guests to welcome them. The cultural norms were inflexible. It was inevitable for the individuals to follow them.

'Things Fall Apart' also records the agro-based culture, some prevalent forms of sports and entertainment, laws and administration, Chauvinism, African oral traditions, mythology and kinship of the Igbo. Achebe did not attempt at glorifying his culture. As a thorough going realist he portrays the life of the Igbo at the close of the 19th century to the 1920's. He describes their day to day activities as well as their mythology and customs as part and parcel of their life. Mythology and customs of a society shows the collected wisdom of generations. They shape their life. But the same mythologies give birth to some beliefs which in progressive times are considered as superstitions. Though painful to follow being part of that culture one cannot escape from them. These beliefs cause troubles for many ill-fated persons like Unoka, who died of swelling in stomach, but they must be followed in conformity to the culture. Thus, these superstitious beliefs are the reasons of their technological backwardness.



The ending of '*Things Fall Apart*' also illustrates the dichotomy of interpretations which cultural backgrounds impose upon a reader. Most readers of Achebe's novel seem to interpret the story of Okonkwo's fall as tragic, if not close to pure tragedy in classical terms. The writer's own feelings about Okonkwo and the conclusion to the book, however, would tend to reveal a rather different interpretation. Here Achebe views the new dispensation as something inevitable, perhaps even desirable. His criticism is clearly of the old way of life which is unsatisfactory now that the west has arrived.

To conclude it is said that '*Things Fall Apart*' is a novel which seeks to address the crisis of culture generated by the exercise of colonial rule. It is a faithful record of Achebe's transitional but turbulent period of African history vis-a-vis Nigeria, whose cultural identity with the advent of Christianity and colonialism come under direct attack till things in the culture fall apart. This is the central theme of the novel. The book, thus, has immense sociological and historical importance and, therefore, it is like a fossil shell which gives a basis for a better understanding of the book and what the writer, Achebe, wants to communicate with a great sensitivity, realism and economy of language. Therefore, it may be concluded that '*Things Fall Apart*' is known for its depiction of cultural tensions and conflict arising out of a clash between tradition and modernity, the real and the occult and so on.

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